



**GREATER KITCHENER WATERLOO
Chamber of Commerce**

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Strategic Plan

2007 - 2010

STRATEGIC PLAN 2007 - 2010

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Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce

Table of Contents		Page
1.0	Chamber Vision, Mission and Roles	3
2.0	Our Organization	3
3.0	Waterloo Region – A Profile	4
4.0	Serving the Community and Chamber Members	5
4.1	Economic Development	6
4.1.1	Manufacturing	6
4.1.2	Coordination of Service Delivery	7
4.1.3	Promoting Responsible Growth Management	7
4.1.4	Electricity Supply	8
4.2	Workforce Development	8
4.2.1	Physician Shortages and Primary Healthcare	8
4.2.2	Immigrant Employment Issues	9
4.3	Enterprise and Membership Development	10
5.0	Partnerships for Prosperity	10
6.0	Strategic Choices	11
6.1	Scope and Role of Chamber	11
6.2.	Client Choices	11
6.3	Program Alignment	12
6.4	Partners	12
6.5	Staff and Volunteer Resources	13
6.6	Facilities	13
6.7	Performance Measures	13
7.0	Next Steps	14
8.0	Summary – Our Future	15
9.0	Appendix	16

1.0 Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce - Our Vision

The Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce is a business association of economic development champions.

As the voice of business for the Greater Kitchener Waterloo area, the Chamber is a strong advocate for continued development of our community and a partner for prosperity.

By working together and focusing on initiatives that support growth, members use the services of the Chamber as an important catalyst for their business success.

Recognized as a leader in one of Canada's most forward-thinking business communities, the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce strives to be the best Chamber of Commerce in Canada.

Our Mission & Roles

To serve business in the Greater Kitchener Waterloo area and be its voice in the betterment of the community.

The Voice of Business

The Chamber plays an important advocacy role by working with all levels of government on issues related to taxation, business regulations, land supply, economic development and essential public services.

Helping Business Succeed

The Chamber offers a broad range of products and services that provide networking, marketing, and educational opportunities for our members and for their employees.

Helping Our Community Succeed

The Chamber is involved in a number of initiatives designed to strengthen local health care services, educational institutions, and the local labour market. The Chamber also encourages business to adopt best practices in terms of environmental sustainability. The attached appendix outlines the chamber's goals and core values.

2.0 Our Organization

As the largest accredited chamber in Ontario, the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce serves over 1900 members representing all sectors of the local business

community. Our membership includes small, medium, and large employers who provide 70,000 jobs in one of Ontario's most progressive and economically diverse regions.

We have been acclaimed as the best networking organization in Waterloo Region, completed two successful chamber mergers in the past fifteen years, and obtained recognition provincially and nationally for community and next generation leadership.

Our focus is the **productivity** of the local business sector and **prosperity** of our community. We serve our members through:

- **Advocacy** with the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government on issues of concern to the business sector and local community;
- **Networking opportunities** from our monthly *Business After Five* events, the *Chamber Plus Networks*, and the *Networking Breakfast Series*;
- **Learning and Education** from *Chamber Academy*, *Talk to the Experts*, and the annual *Environment and Energy Forum*.

3.0 Waterloo Region – A Profile

The growth of our organization is consistent with the growth of our community. The population of the Waterloo Region is currently estimated at 508,000, with an anticipated increase to 729,000 residents within the next twenty-five years.

The economy and population of the Waterloo Region is increasingly diverse. Approximately 20 per cent of Waterloo Region residents were born outside of Canada. Our major established economic sectors include automotive, advanced manufacturing, high-tech, and financial services. Emerging sectors encompass health sciences, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and nanotechnology.

Exports are becoming increasingly important for our region. In 2004, products shipped away totaled \$12 billion, which translated to \$50,000 per employee, compared to the provincial level of \$31,000. Waterloo Region is also the host to more than 240 foreign-owned firms, with major investment from the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Japan, and Holland

Other significant statistics/indicators related to Waterloo Region include:

- a Regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$19.4 billion (2004);
- an additional 158,000 jobs will be created by 2031;
- a net inflow of 29,462 skilled and talented people (1996-2002);
- the third youngest median age (35) of all major Canadian urban areas (2001);
- a 5.4 per cent unemployment rate (2006 Annual Average);
- a median income of \$29,800 – ranking third among Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) (2003).

In Canada, our focus is shifting increasingly to the “region” as the engine of economic growth and activity. In these areas, residents live out their economic lives – find jobs, purchase goods and services, and buy houses.

A region can achieve the economies of scale, scope, and opportunity necessary for the diversity of people and specialized businesses that are essential for success in the current demanding global marketplace. Emerging public policy issues that are now addressed at a local level include workforce demands, transportation infrastructure, housing, and education.

Businesses competing in a global economy can gain a significant competitive advantage from a healthy regional economy that on a long-term, sustainable basis:

- Produces and attracts educated, skilled, and creative people;
- Fosters innovation and accelerates its rapid diffusion through the region;
- Moves people and goods quickly and efficiently;
- Makes smart use of environmental and natural resources;
- Offers affordable housing in close proximity to places of employment; and
- Works to reduce disparities of income and opportunities.

Businesses can be negatively impacted if they are based in an unhealthy region where poor public policy and private sector neglect combine with short-sighted vision to create high levels of poverty, traffic congestion, urban-suburban disparities, and limited access to employment opportunities.

Our Chamber will continue to advance issues of concern for the Waterloo Region business sector and our dependent communities. We have developed significant working relationships with local municipal governments, officials in the health care sector, and educators in developing advocacy campaigns directed at the provincial and federal levels of government.

4.0 Serving the Community and Chamber Members

We serve a community and economy that is diverse, entrepreneurial, and innovative. Our manufacturing and industrial strength is complemented by significant investment in research and development. We also benefit from the presence of four leading post-secondary education institutions – the University of Waterloo, University of Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Conestoga College – with each institution developing significant teaching and research expertise in specific disciplines. The Region of Waterloo is also home to a number of high-profile “think tanks”, including the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, The Centre for International Governance Innovation, and The Academic Council on the United Nations System.

Our priorities for 2007 include:

Economic Development

- **Supporting the Waterloo Region manufacturing sector** through an aggressive and focused advocacy campaign to ensure competitive levels of taxation at all three levels of government;
- **Advocacy for better delivery and coordination of services among local governments** to maintain Waterloo Region's status as an attractive location for jobs, investment, and economic growth;
- **Promoting responsible growth management in Waterloo Region** by ensuring adequate infrastructure funding to meet future requirements;
- **Ensuring a stable supply of electricity at a reasonable cost** by lobbying for new generating capacity.

Workforce Development

- **Work with community partners in addressing primary health care needs** through the Chamber Health Care Recruitment Council;
- **Develop a community response to on-going immigrant employment issues** from the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN).

Enterprise/Membership Development

- **Providing member services** that act as a catalyst for business success, economic growth and job creation in our community.

4.1 Economic Development

4.1.1 Manufacturing

Waterloo Region currently possesses Canada's second most-manufacturing intensive economy after Windsor and Essex County. Approximately 26 per cent of our workforce, translating to over 60, 000 employees, are engaged in producing transportation equipment, fabricated metals, computers and electronics, furniture, electric equipment, and food.

However, our local manufacturing sector is facing some unprecedented issues and challenges. A rising Canadian dollar and competition from low cost producers abroad force operators to make difficult and challenging decisions on a daily basis.

Our Response

In response to on-going concerns, our Chamber established the *Manufacturing Action Group Network*, or MAGNet, a special committee of manufactures with a vision to add to the community's success and prosperity through the attraction and retention of employment.

To date, MAGNet has focused on ensuring that the level of taxation imposed on manufacturers in Waterloo Region makes us competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions within and outside Ontario. The group has made presentations to local governments to ensure that industrial property tax levels in Waterloo Region are at or below the provincial average.

4.1.2 Coordination of Service Delivery at the Municipal Level of Government

Under our current structure of municipal governance in Waterloo Region, eight administrations serve 500,000 residents. Inherently, there exists a series of overlapping jurisdictions and service responsibilities.

The Waterloo Region business community, to compete on international markets, must be efficient and cost-effective in their daily operations. We seek leadership from local governments in providing the same efficiencies in their operations.

Our Response

In November of 2006, the Chamber issued our *Campaign for Better Service Delivery* document, which proposes areas where improved coordination between the regional and local levels of government could initiate significant savings to taxpayers.

4.1.3 Promoting Responsible Growth Management

As Waterloo Region's population increases, the demands on infrastructure and related services will escalate accordingly.

It is incumbent upon current administrations to initiate measures, and allocate all necessary financial resources, to ensure that road congestion and other growth-related issues are mitigated for present and future generations.

Our Response

Our Chamber has initiated extensive advocacy initiatives with all three levels of government to:

- **Expand Highway #7 between Kitchener Waterloo and Guelph** - For over thirty years, our Chamber has been advocating an improved transportation link between Kitchener Waterloo and Guelph. A new four lane route connecting these increasingly important urban centres is required not only for economic but also community safety reasons. We forwarded numerous submissions to the provincial government requesting that a construction schedule be announced with appropriate funding commitments.

Our Chamber's efforts were recognized by provincial and municipal officials when an announcement was made on March 23, 2007, to commence construction on a new Highway #7.

- **Support for Rapid Transit in Waterloo Region** – Rising demands in the absence of increased investment cannot continue without jeopardizing the operating ability of Ontario's public transit systems. The Regional Government is currently conducting an environmental assessment for the development of a rapid transit system within the Central Transit Corridor. Our Chamber asked both the federal and provincial governments to allocate funding for this important initiative.

The 2007 Ontario Budget provides a commitment for a one-third investment to the Kitchener-Waterloo Light Rail Transit system along with federal and municipal partners.

4.1.4 Electricity Supply

Waterloo Region businesses, particularly those in the manufacturing sector, consider the reliable supply of electricity, at a reasonable cost, to be a significant competitiveness issue.

Our Response

Our Chamber has forwarded concerns to the Ontario government related to the current phase out plan for coal fired generating plants. Studies have indicated that the phase out strategy will result in power prices rising by 25 per cent on average after 2008. It is our position that the province must establish tough environmental standards that will reduce emissions without risking critical supplies. The focus must be placed on developing and implementing cleaner coal burning technologies.

4.1 Workforce Development

4.2.1 Physician Shortages and Primary Health Care

Family physician recruitment is critical for meeting the primary health care needs of the region's rapidly growing population.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC), it is estimated that 59,340 residents of Waterloo Region do not have access to a family physician.

The recommended provincial ratio is one physician to 1,380 people, leaving Kitchener Waterloo underserved by 22 full-time equivalent professionals. Our Chamber estimates that number is closer to 40 doctors.

Our Response

Our Chamber has been a community leader in the recruitment of family physicians for close to a decade. In January of 2006, we launched the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Health Care Recruitment Council, with the objectives of:

- Attracting and retaining family physicians;
- Supporting local hospitals with their recruitment and retention activities;
- Making our community attractive to health care professionals and support workers;
- Developing policy and advocacy initiatives to address community health care issues as well as broader provincial policy on the funding and delivery of health care.

4.2.2 Immigrant Employment Issues

Employers in Waterloo Region and across Ontario are increasingly concerned with an aging population and impending labour shortages in designated professions. There are many initiatives in progress, however they lack the coordination to actively engage employers and improve immigrant employment prospects. In Waterloo Region, the skills shortage is compounded by 80 per cent of local graduates securing employment in centres outside the immediate area.

Statistics Canada estimates that by the year 2011, 100 per cent of Canada's net labour market growth will be provided by immigrants. However, the unemployment rate for recent immigrants to Waterloo Region is almost 14 per cent compared to 5 per cent for Canadian born job seekers. In 2001, an average of 37 per cent of immigrants aged 25-49 across Canada possessed a university degree compared to an average of 23 per cent for Canadian residents.

Our Response

Our Chamber has demonstrated community leadership through the development of the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network, or WRIEN. This initiative serves as a forum for local strategies that ensure the skills of immigrants are optimally used to benefit immigrants and their families, our economy, and the community as a whole. It is a comprehensive region-wide strategy that meets local needs and identifies gaps while promoting links. WRIEN is comprised of many community stakeholders, including immigrant leaders, employers, community-based organizations, government, and educational institutions.

We support a highly skilled workforce with the capacity for growth to meet the demands of local employers. We also seek an environment that attracts post-secondary graduates for employment opportunities, and provides assurances of long-term stability.

4.2 Enterprise and Membership Development

The Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce is a business association of economic development champions.

As the voice of business for the Greater Kitchener Waterloo area, the Chamber is a strong advocate for the continued development of our community and a partner for prosperity. By working together and focusing on initiatives that support growth, members use the services of the Chamber as an important catalyst for their business success.

Our Response

Our focus is the enhancement of value for the membership, communication, retention of members, and the attraction of more large employers. Partnerships with other associations and economic development agencies remain critical to that success.

The ultimate success of our organization is in the provision of tangible value for the membership through programs and services that benefit the community, saves money and time, and help businesses meet their corporate objectives.

Networking events, such as our *Chamber Plus Networks*, *Business After Five*, and the *Networking Breakfast Series* provide a constructive exchange of ideas among our members, initiating increased profitability and expanding opportunities for growth.

Learning events, such as *Talk to the Experts* and *Chamber Academy*, provide specialized and focused information on a wide range of critical issues for member businesses.

We will continue our analysis and consideration of new technologies for better service and communication with our members. Podcasts and webinars are examples of forums which provide an alternative to traditional meetings and conferences.

5.0 Partnerships for Prosperity

The Prosperity Council of Waterloo Region

Our Chamber has provided leadership on economic and social issues in the community through the Prosperity Council of Waterloo Region.

The Council is a federation formed to collectively establish an environment that supports opportunities for prosperity in Waterloo Region. In collaboration with our key partners – the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Communitech Technology Association, and Canada’s Technology Triangle (CTT) – we have initiated advocacy efforts resulting in:

- A proposal to service 300 net new hectares of employment land;

- New investments in physician recruitment;
- The Waterloo Region Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame;
- Increased funding for Cambridge Memorial Hospital;
- Significant arts and cultural funding through ArtsVe\$t;
- A higher national media profile for Waterloo Region.

6.0 Strategic Choices

6.1 Scope and Role of Chamber

As noted in Section 3.0, regions are becoming the focus of economic activity in the North American context.

Within this framework, there exist four tiers of engagement for Chambers of Commerce:

- Tier 1 – the “**Bigger Chamber**” Model, where the organization extends its influence through a bigger service area;
- Tier 2 – the **Facilitator** Model where a regional mission is formulated and executed;
- Tier 3 – the **Regional Partner** Model where alliances are created for specific goals;
- Tier 4 – the **Regional Alliance** Model where a Chamber collaborates with other local sectors (business, government, civic).

Strategic Question

What level of regional engagement should the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce pursue for now and the future?

6.2 Client Choices

Our research indicates that members join our organization for two primary reasons:

- The transactional benefits focused on their enterprises;
- Accomplishments derived through the Chamber as a forum for idea exchange and action on large community economic development issues.

Our organization generally segments members into four categories:

- Business Investors: 52%
- Business Builders: 23%
- Community Investors: 19%
- Community Builders 6%

Strategic Question

What profile of members does the Chamber hope to attract in the future?

6.3 Program Alignment

Our Chamber offers over 200 events annually with a myriad of programs and services. These initiatives are aligned to the strategic direction of the organization and also make a contribution to our bottom line. As the chamber expands, an “effort vs. value” analysis is required.

Strategic Question

What should the Chamber discontinue to better fulfill its mandate and operate more effectively on behalf of the membership?

6.4 Partners

As noted in Section 4.0, the Chamber’s priorities encompass:

- Economic Development
- Workforce Development
- Enterprise and Membership Development

Our organization does not possess full responsibility for delivering these services in our community. We have developed effective and productive partnerships with:

Economic Development

- Canada’s Technology Triangle
- Economic Development staff from the Cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge
- Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade.

Enterprise Development

- Communitech
- Centre for Business, Entrepreneurship, and Technology, University of Waterloo
- Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Waterloo Region Small Business Centre

Workforce Development

- Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN)
- Waterloo Wellington Training and Adjustment Board

Strategic Question

To what degree do the mandates of our partners align with the Chamber? Should the Chamber seek mergers with, for example, Communitech or Canada's Technology Triangle?

As our Chamber develops positions on the aforementioned questions, subsequent decisions will be made on issues related to staff and volunteer resources, facilities, and performance measures.

6.5 Staff and Volunteer Resources

With new initiatives being added each year, our staff has grown to 16 employees in the last six years. A senior management structure has been implemented, and a strong complement of over 300 volunteers remains critical for organizational effectiveness.

The support, encouragement, and guidance of volunteer leaders require significant time due to the current operating model which is committee based and revolves around monthly meetings.

Other effective business advocacy organizations, such as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, designate more reliance on surveys to engage members rather than committees. As our organization develops, meeting and survey frequency need to be balanced with other strategies for engagement.

6.6 Facilities

The growth in services has created space issues with the Chamber's facilities.

The current office is centrally and strategically located in downtown Kitchener, however space limitations are creating issues in relation to the:

- delivery of service to the members;
- restrictions in the development of new initiatives.

As the fundamental strategic questions are addressed, options for the chamber's head office will need to be considered.

6.7 Performance Measures

The Chamber has always had a strong focus on results and will need to continually develop and monitor new measures of success as its mandate evolves. Our Chamber has utilized the following measures for monitoring and evaluating performance:

Financial Objectives

- Budget Targets

Association Size

- Membership unit and dollar targets
- Recruitment and retention targets

Engagement of Membership

- Participation levels at volunteer committees
- Attendance and sponsorship levels at events
- Annual event reach/participation ratio
- Results of member satisfaction surveys
- Levels of staff and volunteer morale

Effectiveness of Advocacy/Chamber Profile

- Comparative number and quality of advocacy submissions
- Response to policy submissions (government action)
- Media exposure
- Number of high profile speakers/visits/meeting requests
- Community recognition (awards/invitations/appointments)

7.0 Next Steps

The 2007-08 year is being characterized as one of strategic alignment. This strategic plan poses a number of questions about the future direction for the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. A series of discussion briefs for the fall/winter are planned for consideration. The Board of Directors has set the following milestones to decide on the strategic choices that lie ahead:

Scope and Role of the Chamber: A discussion brief will be made available at the October 2007 board meeting for consideration with decision scheduled for the January 2008 strategic planning session.

Client Choices: A discussion brief will be considered by the Board of Directors at their October meeting with decision scheduled for January 2008.

Program Alignment: An update on program choices and recommendations on delivery options will be considered by the Board at their November meeting with decision scheduled for January 2008.

Partners: A review and recommendations of potential partnerships required and sought to fulfill the chamber's strategic direction will be considered at the December board meeting.

Staff and Volunteer Resources: A discussion brief outlining options for the optimal use of human resources, meeting frequency etc. will be considered by the Board in September.

Facilities: A discussion brief outlining options for the Chamber facilities will be considered at the September board meeting.

Performance Measures: As the chamber fully implements its new database and orients new staff, systems and measures can be established to track performance against objectives. A review and recommendations for key measures will be discussed at the November board meeting.

8.0 Summary – Our Future

The Waterloo Region business sector is diverse, entrepreneurial and innovative. Our Chamber is committed to building a strong community where residents across a wide range of cultures can live, work, and raise their families in a safe and supportive environment. We will work toward a strong and vibrant community with outstanding educational institutions and universal access to primary health care services.

The anticipated economic and population growth forecasted for our region provides new challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, our Chamber, in collaboration with our community partners and governments at all levels, must build a solid foundation for the future.

We serve as a catalyst for initiatives that positively impact our members and community. Through focused advocacy and service to the local business sector, the Chamber will continue in building our leadership and facilitation strengths for community prosperity.

9.0 Appendix

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- To foster and support private enterprise, economic vitality, and stability.
- To promote the economic development of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Area.
- To coordinate the efforts of commerce, industry, and the professions in maintaining and strengthening a sound and healthy business climate in the surrounding area.
- To provide creative leadership and effective coordination of all interested parties in solving community problems and in initiating constructive community action.
- To provide a forum for an exchange of ideas.
- To be the advocate of business with government.
- To develop and increase the membership base.
- To be financially responsible.
- To create a broad understanding and appreciation of the many opportunities in the surrounding area, and to promote the advantages and assets of the community.
- To create a climate conducive to developing individual volunteers through participation and interaction.
- To communicate effectively with members and solicit their opinions and feedback.
- To provide challenging and stimulating employment that is productive and personally rewarding for staff.
- To create an enthusiastic working partnership between staff and member-volunteers built on trust and mutual respect.

CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS

Our core values centre on the beliefs that:

- Serving our members' needs is the primary reason for the existence of the Chamber.
- Volunteers are a key resource through which we accomplish our objectives.
- Trust, open communications, integrity, personal accountability and initiative are critical to our organization's success.
- The free market economy is the primary means to achieve a prosperous and well balanced community.
- Governments and public funded entities must be accountable, responsible, effective, and efficient
- Business has an obligation to act in an environmentally responsible manner and to support necessary social, cultural, health and educational systems.
- Effective mission-focused partnerships are key to our community's success.